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TURQUOISE MOUNTAIN SMITHSONIAN EXHIBITION

MARCH 2015 – DECEMBER 2016

\$535,055

OVERVIEW

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supports the Turquoise Mountain Trust to showcase traditional Afghan handicrafts entitled Turquoise Mountain: Artists Transforming Afghanistan at the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution's national museums of Asian art in Washington, D.C. The exhibition, which started in March 2016 and runs to January 2017 tells the story of how the traditional artisan community of Murad Khane in Kabul, Afghanistan, was revived through the preservation of its traditional architecture. The exhibition allows visitors to interact with Afghan artisans engaged in producing traditional handicrafts. This project helps USAID accomplish its mission of creating jobs, building links between Afghan producers and the international market, and highlights USAID's support of women in business. The exhibition is a highly visible and tangible USAID success story that enables U.S. audiences to see Afghanistan, in the vision

of President Ashraf Ghani, as “open and engaged with the wider world.” After Washington, the exhibition will potentially travel to other museums around the United States and possibly other locations.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

The opening reception for the exhibition at the Smithsonian Freer and Sackler Galleries was held on March 14, 2016. Speeches about the richness of the Afghan arts, the creativity of Afghan artisans, and the progress the country has made in recent years were delivered by Director of the Freer and Sackler Galleries of Art Dr. Julian Raby, CEO of Turquoise Mountain Shoshana Stewart, USAID Assistant to the Administrator Larry Sampler, Afghan Ambassador to the United States Hamdullah Mohib, Afghan Minister of Information and Culture Abdul Bari Jahani, Deputy Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Michael McKinley. On the evening of March 15, another reception was held where First Lady Laura Bush introduced the new Bush Institute book, *We Are Afghan Women: Voices of Hope*. Both events were well attended and the exhibition was extensively covered by the press including: British Broadcasting Corporation (English and Persian services), the Washington Post, Agence France-Presse, the New York Times, the Economist, the Washingtonian, ITV, and Pajwhok.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Since the Smithsonian Freer and Sackler Galleries began recording attendance numbers, over 49,000 visitors have come to see the exhibition.
- Traditional handicraft demonstrations by Afghan artisans in the exhibition space and in other locations in the area have been very popular with the public. On May 28, 2016 alone, 2,120 visitors came to see a demonstration by Afghan ceramicist Matin Malekzada.
- The exhibition was also a real social media success, with the Freer|Sackler social media team reporting 3.4 million impressions on Twitter alone in the first month of the exhibition.
- The museum shop had great success selling Turquoise Mountain products and has almost completely sold out of its initial inventory of Turquoise Mountain product. They have re-ordered.
- The program provides jobs for more than 100 Afghans citizens over a nine month period, of which 35 percent are women.

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